

REMARKS

Applicant requests favorable consideration and allowance of the subject application in view of the preceding amendments and the following remarks.

Claims 29 and 30 are presented for consideration. Claim 29 is the sole independent claim. Claims 29 and 30 have been amended to clarify features of the subject invention. Support for these changes can be found in the original application, as filed. Therefore, no new matter has been added.

Applicant requests favorable reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection set forth in the above-noted Office Action.

Claims 29 and 30 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102 as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,542,220 to Schrijver et al. Applicant submits that the cited art does not teach many features of the present invention, as previously recited in independent claim 29. Therefore, this rejection is respectfully traversed. In addition, Applicant submits that independent claim 29, for example, as presented, amplifies the distinctions between the present invention and the cited art.

Independent claim 29 recites an exposure apparatus including a reticle stage which holds a reticle, a projection optical system which projects a pattern of the reticle onto a substrate, a base plate disposed between the reticle stage and the projection optical system, the base plate supporting the reticle stage and having an opening for transmitting exposure light, a sheet glass held by the base plate at the opening and transmitting the exposure light, and a supply system which supplies an inert gas to a first space and a second space, the first space being defined by the reticle, the reticle stage, the base plate and the sheet glass, and the second space being defined by the projection optical system, the base plate and the sheet glass.

By such an arrangement, in the present invention, the sheet glass is held by the base plate at the opening of the base plate. Further, the supply system supplies an inert gas to first and second spaces, wherein the first space is defined by the reticle, the reticle stage, the base plate and the sheet glass, and the second space is defined by the projection optical system, the base plate and the sheet glass.

Applicant submits that the cited art does not teach or suggest such features of the present invention, as recited in independent claim 29.

The Schrijver et al. patent relates to a lithographic apparatus that has at least one compartment surrounding at least one of mask and substrate holders, but not either of an illumination system or a projection system, in order to reduce the volume that must be purged with gas transparent to the projection radiation. The Schrijver et al. patent, at column 8, lines 40-43, discusses that the lower purge plate 220 is fixed to the projection system support structure and includes an aperture around the top element in the projection system PL. The Examiner, in turn, asserts that the top element of the Schrijver et al. patent corresponds to the sheet glass of the present invention. Applicant submits, however, that the top element in the device in the Schrijver et al. patent is not held by a member supporting a mask stage. Accordingly, Applicant submits that the Schrijver et al. patent fails to teach or suggest the salient features of at least the supply system of the present invention recited in independent claim 29. Applicant submits, therefore, that the Schrijver et al. patent should not be read to anticipate Applicant's invention recited in that claim.

For the foregoing reasons, Applicant submits that the present invention, as recited in independent claim 29, is patentably defined over the cited art.

Dependent claim 30 also should be deemed allowable, in its own right, for defining other patentable features of the present invention in addition to those recited in independent claim 29. Further individual consideration of this dependent claim is requested.

Applicant further submits that the instant application is in condition for allowance.

Favorable reconsideration, withdrawal of the rejection set forth in the above-noted Office Action and an early Notice of Allowance are requested.

Applicant's undersigned attorney may be reached in our Washington, D.C. office by telephone at (202) 530-1010. All correspondence should be directed to our address listed below.

Respectfully submitted,



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Attorney for Applicant

Steven E. Warner

Registration No. 33,326

FITZPATRICK, CELLA, HARPER & SCINTO  
30 Rockefeller Plaza  
New York, New York 10112-3801  
Facsimile: (212) 218-2200  
SEW/eab

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